

**THRIVE IN SOMALIA**



# **Restoring fragile ecosystems and creating sustainable livelihood opportunities through THRIVE**



**MARCH 2024**

# ACTED'S FLAGSHIP PROGRAM THRIVE

**THRIVE – Towards Holistic Resilience in Vulnerable Environments.** Acted's THRIVE initiative aims to build resilience across agro-pastoral communities through a holistic approach that: repairs ecosystems, provides sustainable livelihoods and improves social cohesion through natural resource management. THRIVE recognizes the interconnected dynamics between ecosystems, markets, and social cohesion. THRIVE builds the resilience of agricultural, pastoral and agropastoral communities in arid and semi-arid rangelands through three pillars: **REVIVE** (ecosystem restoration), **EMERGE** (livelihoods), and **INTEGRATE** (social cohesion).

The Programmatic Strategy for the period 2020-2025 sets out Acted's most important objectives: Zero Exclusion (because nobody should be left behind), Zero Carbon (because we only have one planet) and Zero Poverty (because poverty should not hold back potential). THRIVE links in closely with this 3ZERO strategy. Mainly set between ZERO exclusion and ZERO carbon, THRIVE connects with Acted's objective of collaborative and ZERO carbon, THRIVE connects with Acted's objective of collaborative and resilient eco-system management - one of the 9 pillars of the Strategy, all guided by motto "Think Local – Act Global".

## KEY FACTS (2023)

Acted in Somalia / land

 **196**  
STAFF

 **10**  
PROJECTS

 **944,568**  
BENEFICIARIES

 **29.5M**  
ANNUAL BUDGET

## REVIVE

Regenerative Earthworks and Vegetation for Vibrant Ecosystems – **the first pillar**, recognizes that elements of livelihoods and environments are intrinsically linked and must be treated as a single system. The objective of REVIVE is to restore land while enhancing and diversifying agricultural production. As an agro-ecology program which uses regenerative agricultural practices, REVIVE mimics natural patterns applied to agricultural production with a deliberate effort to restore degraded soils.

## EMERGE

**The second pillar** EMERGE – Enhancing Market Economies for Rural Growth and Empowerment – leverages such restored landscapes to support communities to build inclusive value chains and improving access to market systems. It supports communities to understand and implement climate smart adaptation techniques, such as introducing drought resistant seeds, or training pastoralists on resilient livestock practices.

## INTEGRATE

**The third and final pillar** INTEGRATE – Intercommunal Exchange to Grow Robust Agro-pastoral Transboundary Ecosystems and Economies – promotes social cohesion with a focus on natural resource management. It is critical that natural resources are managed in a way that also ensures their continued presence for future generations. Thus, integrated natural resource management that supports peaceful sharing and sustainable use of resources is a critical aspect of resilient communities.

# SOMALIA: SITUATION OVERVIEW

## Overview of needs/need for THRIVE

Somalia is **the most vulnerable country to climate change in the world**, scoring 185 on the ND-Gain index. Being immediately exposed to the consequences of a changing world climate, Somalia has faced a series of drought, especially in 2022/23, when a famine was marginally averted. While rain has brought relief from the 2023 crisis situation and a 17% reduction of total people in need, Deyr floods in 2023 have affected 2.48 million people, displacing 1.2 million (OCHA Somalia Situation Report, Dec. 2023). The IPC Acute Food Insecurity and Malnutrition Snapshot Aug-Dec 2023 reports 4.3 million people projected to face acute food insecurity in Somalia, showcasing high vulnerability. This overall vulnerability is compounded by over-grazing and climate change impacts, negatively

impacting especially Somali communities reliant on livestock.

While humanitarian aid remains highly important for Somalia, sustainable recovery from shocks and mitigation of negative consequences of climate change will require longer-term solutions, including a **need to strengthen adaptive, climate-change resilient agricultural practices**. Thus, the potential to support people in meeting their daily needs through THRIVE projects remains immense, especially given the fact that Somalia is dominated by rangelands, such as grasslands, deserts, or woody savanna, which are the primary target landscape for THRIVE interventions. Further funding will be required to implement additional projects that meet this growing need to work towards resilient

## Overview of Acted's Past REVIVE Projects in Somalia/land

Since 2019, Acted implemented five THRIVE programs in Somalia, which were supported by USAID, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, the European Union and the French Embassy for Kenya and Somalia. Within these projects, Acted worked on the key nexus between disaster risk reduction and natural resource management within selected watersheds by combining **ecosystem restoration**

with the building of **sustainable livelihoods**. Community engagement was at the center of the approach, working with them on enhancing their resilience, while at the same time engaging in regenerative agriculture practices, offering trainings via farmer field water conservation measures, restoring vegetation biodiversity, and establishing dedicated field schools for rangeland management.

## Examples of successful implementation of the THRIVE approach in Somalia

**Western Somaliland, 2019:** The first THRIVE project was implemented in the community of Magola Cad, Western Somaliland in 2019. The project was funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and served 850 households (5,100 individuals). The project focused on establishing perennial, bio-diverse production systems using regenerative earthworks and vegetation strategies to restore soil nutrients and water cycles. Key activities included training stakeholders in water harvesting techniques and providing temporary employment through cash-for-work programs. During the project, 30,000 trees were planted

and earthworks completed.

**Across Somalia and Somaliland, 2021:** The second program was implemented in 2021, led by Acted and funded by the French Embassy, targeted 5,431 households in various districts of Somaliland and Somalia. The focus was on establishing sustainable agricultural systems to restore soil health and enhance food security. Activities included regenerative agriculture training, earthworks, vegetation enhancement, agricultural diversification, and post-harvest handling techniques to strengthen resilience and food autonomy.

**Jubaland, 2021:** Acted, with support from the Somalia Humanitarian Fund, led a project in 2021 in Garbaharey, Somalia, supplying agricultural inputs to 3,500 drought-affected households. This aimed to mitigate food insecurity by offering small-scale agricultural aid. Implemented during Somalia’s longest drought, it showcased the potential of the THRIVE initiative to tackle crises. The project injected cash into communities via cash-for-work programs to dig earthworks, while also priming the land for rainfall. Earthworks were constructed to capture rainwater runoff, facilitating its absorption into the soil and

curbing erosion. This multifaceted approach not only addressed immediate needs but also laid groundwork for sustainable resilience against future challenges.

**Somaliland, ongoing:** In addition to these historic programs, Acted has two ongoing THRIVE programs in Somaliland, one funded by the French Embassy food aid program, and one funded by EuropeAid. These programs have a combined value of 3 million Euros, and began in the last quarter of 2024, thus no findings from those projects are integrated in this document.

Thrive in Somalia - main achievements

**2** watersheds targeted: Magalo-cad , in the Ogaden watershed and Magalo-Qalooc, in the Durdur watershed, both located in Awdal region, Somaliland.

**152 256**  
beneficiaries (population of the  
2 target watersheds)

**985**  
hectares of degraded  
land rehabilitated

**3M**  
current budget for  
THRIVE (in USD)

The four-year perspective: assessing impact of THRIVE in Somalia & Somaliland

To understand the long-term effect of these projects on the environment, Acted has undertaken an impact assessment of its past THRIVE. The results will be presented on the following pages, split by the different THRIVE pillars.

METHODOLOGY

A mixed-method approach was used, utilizing household surveys, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Additionally, a visual soil quadrant assessment was performed following FAO guidelines. The assessment took place in Magala Qaloc and Magala Cad in Borama district, Somaliland, and Garbaharey district, Gedo region, Somalia from October–November 2023. Unique questionnaires were designed jointly by the program and MEAL teams for each data collection method, considering the diverse project activities in both districts. This tailored approach aimed to capture the nuances of each district’s context, ensuring a comprehensive and contextually sensitive assessment of project outcomes.



## REVIVE IN SOMALIA

The objective of REVIVE is to restore land while enhancing and diversifying agricultural production using regenerative agricultural practices and mimicking natural patterns applied to agricultural production with a deliberate effort to restore degraded soils.

### Findings on soil health

The household assessment revealed that 68% of respondents had a high level of knowledge on soil nutrient and crop management, while 22% rated their understanding as moderate, with the remaining considering their knowledge low. Those with inadequate knowledge attributed crop devastation during rainy seasons to runoff water, which shows at least an understanding of the issues of run-off water due to lack of vegetation cover in degraded landscapes. Nearly all participants (99%) observed improved soil quality in their community due to Acted's regenerative farming practices. In Borama district, 95% acknowledged soil quality improvements on their farms since Acted's REVIVE project, while 5% remained neutral. Specifically, in Magala Qaloc and Magala Cad, all respondents noted significant soil health improvements from contour swales and micro-earthworks, with all understanding the benefits of soil moisture improvement post-project. Focus group discussions attested to the visible impact of earthworks on soil quality, including increased vegetation, erosion control, and improved water infiltration. On

average, 39% of households reported meeting water needs through soil moisture recharge, 50% nearly meeting, and 11% experiencing some improvement.



### Findings on good agricultural practices

In Borama district, all surveyed households received training from Acted, focusing on activities such as digging of earthworks, farmer managed natural regeneration, and water catchment rehabilitation. The majority (80%) consistently applied the agricultural techniques learned, with 16% occasionally utilizing them and 4% rarely doing so. Participants in focus group discussions reported improved soil texture, livestock fodder, and household income due to farming management practices taught by Acted. Additionally, community cooperation led to new crop plantations supporting activities like animal fattening and crop rotation. In Garbaharey district, 90% adopted new agricultural methods

due to Acted's project. Notable increases in crop yield and quality were observed in both districts, attributed to Acted's inputs and training. Diversification of crop production was reported by 39% of respondents, with 43% noting substantial diversification. Respondents noted significant differences in crop yields between farmers using regenerative methods and those who don't. Moreover, livestock health and resilience improved for 98% of households implementing the REVIVE approach, with all key informants highlighting the importance of continuous livestock management training in future projects.

## EMERGE AND INTEGRATE IN SOMALIA

### Emerge

The objective of EMERGE is to leverage landscapes restored under REVIVE to support communities and to build inclusive value chains and improving access to market systems.

#### Findings on access to food, livelihoods and income

All respondents reported significant improvements in household food security and income generation due to the support received, with 91% noting a noticeable increase in income and livelihoods. Participants highlighted the project's impact on the nutritional value of consumed food, attributing it to on-farm crop cultivation, leading to income savings. Locally sourced food now comprises a significant portion of daily diets for most households. All

participants recognized the project's positive impact on community diet and nutrition, reducing malnutrition and fostering food diversification. Income diversification was evident, with surplus crop sales and livestock sales being the most common sources of earnings. In Borama district, participants noted positive outcomes in income-generating activities and improved access to education due to reduced need for child labor. Market accessibility improved for 75% of respondents, with enhanced market information and collaboration expanding product range and negotiation power. Women's participation and empowerment in agriculture increased significantly, leading to improved production, income, and gender equity in farming communities.

### Integrate

INTEGRATE promotes social cohesion with a focus on natural resource management, supporting peaceful sharing and sustainable use of resources, with the overall aim to support communities in coping with environmental challenges in a joint effort.

#### Findings on community adaptive capacity

Household survey respondents universally received training or information on adapting to changing environmental conditions, with nearly all respondents actively participating in or benefiting from Acted's biodiversity conservation efforts. Most respondents felt prepared to cope with environmental challenges after the project, with an increase in biodiversity reported by 99% in the community. In Garbaharey district, 80% faced challenges in maintaining project benefits, primarily attributed to weather-related issues (91%). Challenges in income diversification in Borama district included crop pests and water scarcity. However, efforts in Magala Cad and Magala Qaloc resulted in increased production, improved community resilience, and employment opportunities. Water pan rehabilitation extended

water retention from three weeks to over five months, showcasing the success of community-led initiatives in sustainable development and water resource management, contributing to improved agricultural activities, livestock support, and overall water security.



## LESSONS LEARNT, CHALLENGES, AND KEY AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

### Agricultural challenges faced in target communities

The main challenges in sustainable development and water resource management, contributing to improved agricultural activities, livestock support, and overall water security in the assessed project locations were:

**Pests & diseases:** These pose a significant challenge to crop production in the Magalo-cad & Magalo-qalooq areas and adversely affect crop yields, leading to significant economic losses for farmers.

**Limited rainfall:** Target locations experienced limited rainfall over the past few years. Insufficient rainfall hampers agricultural productivity, making it challenging for farmers to sustain their livelihoods and achieve food security.

**Soil erosion,** particularly gully erosion, is a pressing challenge that affects the stability of the land and water resources, leading to the loss of fertile topsoil and decreasing agricultural productivity. Furthermore, erosion contributes to sedimentation in water bodies, impacting overall water resource management.

**Lack of extension services** in Somaliland/Somalia poses a barrier to farmers' access to vital information, modern techniques, and best practices in agriculture and livestock management. The lack of support and guidance limits farmers' capacity to adopt sustainable practices and improve their productivity.

**Limited availability of certified seeds:** Prevalence of poor-quality seeds hinder agricultural development. Access to high-quality seeds is crucial for enhancing crop yields, improving resilience to pests and diseases.

**Land degradation:** This poses a significant challenge to agricultural productivity and water resource management. Degraded soils lack nutrients and organic matter, leading to decreased fertility and reduced crop yields. Addressing it is key to enhance agricultural activities and overall water security.



## Best practices of THRIVE implementation

The following best practices have contributed to previous successful THRIVE implementation:

- **Integration of cash-for-work (CfW) activities:** This approach empowered community ownership, leading to an over-achievement of project targets, forstering a sense of responsibility and pride and ensuring the sustainability and success of the projects. Each CfW beneficiary actively contributed one meter per day, including all dimensions.
- **Utilization of A-Frames for land restoration activities:** A-Frames were employed as a replacement for the theodolite instrument to measure land elevation. These A-Frames were locally made and aligned with REVIVE principles. This practice enabled accurate and efficient land restoration activities, ensuring project and cost-effectiveness.
- **Strong complaints and response mechanism (CRM):** The Acted CRM system proved to be strong and effective. It empowered the community by enhancing accountability and transparency in project implementation by providing a platform for community feedback and addressing complaints. Through this, the CRM system fostered community trust.
- **Community consultations:** During the project implementation period Acted engaged the farmers, community leaders, and local authorities in decision-making processes. This participatory approach was key to the projects' successes, as it ensured that projects were aligned with local needs, priorities, and cultural considerations. By including diverse perspectives, the projects were more sustainable and relevant to the community.

## Lessons learned during THRIVE implementation in Somalia

Based on the past THRIVE projects, several valuable lessons have been learned:

- **Ideal project duration:** It is crucial to have at least 2 years to observe and measure the impact of resilience projects effectively. This longer duration allows for sufficient time to implement interventions, monitor progress, and measure the project's results.
- **Strategic timing of cash-for-work (CfW) activities:** to minimize disruptions to the daily farming activities and ensure the community's survival during lean periods, it is advisable to start CfW activities during the lean or dry period. This approach ensures that farmers can engage in CfW and benefit from the income generated without compromising their farming activities.
- **Timely provision of inputs to farmers:** Necessary inputs, such as seeds and other agricultural tools, should be provided between February to March. This timing ensures that farmers can utilize the inputs effectively and maximize their use during the rainy season.
- **Cultural factors:** In the Somali context, cultural factors may hinder women's participation in CfW activities. It is important to recognize and respect these cultural norms and adapt project activities accordingly, ensuring that alternative opportunities for women's empowerment and economic inclusion are provided.
- **Consultation with farmers and community leaders:** Engaging these key stakeholders fosters a sense of ownership, ensures that interventions are aligned with community needs, and enhances the overall effectiveness and sustainability of the projects.



# THRIVE

TOWARDS HOLISTIC RESILIENCE IN VULNERABLE ENVIRONMENTS